Upon the Chaos (Dark and Rude)

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Upon the Chaos (Dark and Rude)

by AtticusCrete

Summary

An unsinkable boat, an unshakeable love, and an unforeseen disaster. Not everything will be lost, or indeed, everyone.

Hannigram - Titanic style. (Not based on the film!)

Seven chapters.

Notes

Title comes from the hymn 'Eternal Father, Strong to Save'. How could I not?

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

James Price, Surgeon on the White Star Line looks down at the girl. Almost an adult but not quite. And clearly in some considerable pain. He looks back to the mother,

“Has she been like this long?”

The mother shrugs, wide eyed and anxious, but it's the father who speaks,

“She's had a bit of an ache. On and off. Nothing like this though. Didn't expect it. We've been giving her salts.”

Dr Price nods. Epsom Salts, not so bad if it had been wind or some gastric thing. But he thinks this might be appendicitis. He sits beside her and presses a hand gently to the girl’s side and she opens her eyes beseechingly. Pretty girl, blue eyes and brown hair. Frightened though. Looks as though she's been frightened for a while. Hard to tell if it is just this. Maybe something else. He sees the girl glance up at her father standing just to her other side. And then to her mother. Nothing though for the young man who fetched him. A brother, or a fiancé maybe. He looks at the man. He's standing a little aside and back, next to the steward who'd accompanied them down to steerage.

“Alright. I'd like to get her up to the hospital. No. Don't worry. We won't charge you for it. We look after our passengers. We’ll take good care of her. Do you want to come along?”

Her mother nods and her father too, but more slowly and with more reserve. Jim Price can't get it but there's something there. Something troublesome. The mother turns to the young man,

“Mr Graham thank you. You've been very kind. We wouldn't have fussed the doctor. But if it's serious?”

Dr Price nods,

“I'd like a better look at her. Away from here.”

He gestures around the small space. Some privacy, but not enough. Not for what they might have to do. The little hospital might be well set up on the ship but he's never performed an apendectomy. God. He wonders briefly if the new nurse might have attended at one. His deputy won't have, nor the matron. He thinks briefly of the passengers in first class. There are a few medics there, so maybe?

Louise Hobbs nods,

“Alright then. I'll come. Dad? You coming?”

For a moment Dr Price thinks the man is also her father, but realises it's just a form of address. And one that's common down here in third class. The girl's father nods and makes to

bend to pick her up. He looks irritated when Dr Price holds a hand out.

“We’ll get a stretcher for her. Easier on the girl. Abigail did you say? Alright. Abigail my dear, we're going to take you up to the hospital now. Don't worry. We’ll have a look and get you all sorted out. Alright then? It will be a little uncomfortable for a bit more but I've something for the pain too. Your mother will come. Don't worry. And your young man.”

Abigail glances behind him to where Mr Graham is standing, Louise Hobbs makes a small sound,

“Oh. He's not her young man. Just a friend. He's been very kind to us. Haven't you?”

The man shuffles and smiles,

“Of course. Don't give it a thought. I'm just glad we all realised.”

Mr Hobbs makes a small noise that might be a snort of disagreement. Dr Price looks between them all,

“Mr Zeller? Could you organise a stretcher? I'll go and warn matron and our nurse. They're very good. Mr Graham is it? Could you come with me? I'd like to hear of any symptoms you noticed?”

The young man looks surprised but agrees. Dr Price looks at Mrs Hobbs and then at Abigail.

“I'm reasonably certain we can sort this all out. You'll come with her? She'll need the support. Thank you. When Mr Zeller comes back with the stretcher make sure you don't shilly shally. I'd like to make progress on this today.”

Everyone nods. Here Dr Price’s authority conquers any doubts or concerns. Even Mr Hobbs can't really stay his hand, no good reason to offer. Though Price thinks he's looking for one, though he can't imagine what it could be, or why.

…….

Up near the second deck Dr Price pauses and looks at Mr Graham,

“Let's stop for a second. I'm not clear on the circumstances here. You don't know the girl?”

“No. Nor the family. We happened to be berthed near by and the girl was clearly unhappy. I thought it was just the crossing. Or leaving home. Or the like. Usual story. Family in the mid-west, they're going to join them. They've saved for a long time. All of them.”

The doctor nods. Of course. Doesn't explain the man though. A little shy behind his glasses, a little quiet.

“What about you?”

“Me? Oh. Mechanic. Got a job offer in Baltimore, cousin of my boss. Better job, better prospects. Hard to resist the siren call of the US of A.”

He smiles a little and Dr Price is charmed.

“Let me be candid. Is the girl alright? Apart from the pain?”

The young man looks at him and takes his glasses off and polishes them and then without returning them to his face looks back at Dr Price.

“Honestly? I'm not sure. There's something. You caught it too didn't you?”

Dr Price nods.

“Yes. Something. Let's get the girl settled. I'm going to see if there's anyone who can assist me from the passenger list. Will you come with me? I want a first hand account of how it's been for her? I couldn't tell if her mother and father were simply unobservant or obstructive.”

The other man nods.

“I understand. I've paid attention. Miss Hobbs has talked a bit about it. She's been off for a few weeks.”

Dr Price rests a hand on his arm,

“Let’s save it until we can find another body to help.”

“My name’s Will, Will Graham. Are you hoping there's another doctor on board?”

“I know there are. I've an assistant surgeon, he's good. But if this is what I think it is, it's outside both of our experience. But I've seen at least three doctors on the passenger list.. I think I know one of them, or of one of them at least. If it's him we'll be in luck.”

…….

Up in the small six bed hospital the nurse and matron greet Will with the polite friendliness that Dr Price insists on for all the passengers whatever class they're travelling in. He's lucky. He's travelled with the matron regularly and though Miss Katz is new he likes what he's seen of the kind and competent nurse.

“We've a young woman coming in. Just a girl really. I think appendicitis. Have we got the passenger list to hand? I want to see if we can find someone to take a lead if it is.”

Miss Katz blinks at him,

“Can we do surgery? Really?”

Dr Price smiles,

“Of course. Silvestri is good with the ether. It's not that I'm worried about. And we've plenty of carbolic. I'm just hoping it's not close to bursting, poor child. Then we'd be in real trouble.”

The two women nod and Dr Price directs Miss Katz to the operating room to start to tidy and clean it further. And to put the instruments to boil. He and the matron look over the list. He runs a finger down it and then laughs,

“I thought so. He's down here under his title. Oh and his sister too. Oh well. He won't mind leaving her I'm sure. Good. She has a maid. No need for her to be nervous left alone for a bit. Right. Good. Mr Graham will you come with me, then we can tell Dr Lecter about Miss Hobbs on the walk back? Matron, help Miss Katz and find Dr Silvestri will you? Tell him I think appendicitis.”

She nods and leaves the small, clean room. Dr Price looks at Mr Graham, clearly interested in the small hospital,

“Is it divided up for the different classes?”

“What? Oh yes? Stupid really. As though infection can't jump a partition or curtains. Still, there we are. At least there are no bones made about treating anyone.”

Mr Graham nods slowly,

“Yes. I suppose. Who's the other surgeon? Someone you know?”

“Dr Lecter? Actually he's a Count of some kind. European originally. Naturalised American citizen now. I've seen him operate. Demonstration thing. Very very good. He helped with the old king. Not the original appendectomy but since then.”

“Expensive.”

“Usually. But he's a decent fellow I believe. He'll be willing to help. Novel too. Something for the dinner table, or the lecture circuit. Oh. I've shocked you.”

Will shakes his head.

“No. Of course. I understand, as long as he helps.”

“He will. I'm sure. Coming?”

Will nods and follows Dr Price down a companionway and several staircases, eventually emerging on to a small corridor with several doors off it. Dr Price looks back at Mr Graham and then knocks on one of them.

It's opened a few moments later by a woman with chestnut hair pulled back and an open enquiring expression,

“Sir?”

“Miss Bloom? You're Miss Lecter’s maid? Yes?”

She nods at him.

“Sir?”

“I'm looking for Dr Lecter, if he's here? I know it's a little early. We've an emergency with one of the passengers and I'm hoping for some help. I'm James Price, the ship’s surgeon.”

From inside they hear a voice, deeper, with a marked European accent,

“Miss Bloom?”

She smiles briefly at Dr Price and flicks a glance at Mr Graham just behind him.

“It's a Dr Price Sir. And a companion.”

“Bring them in do, Dr Price? I'm Hannibal Lecter how can I assist? Some medical thing? Did I hear right?”

He extends a hand and Jim Price shakes it, good, Lecter is as charming as he remembers. He's especially pleased when the Count makes no bones about leaning past him and extending a hand to Mr Graham too.

“I'm very sorry to disturb you. I think we've a case of appendicitis, one of the young women in steerage. I wondered. Well. I wondered if you might be willing to come. Check my diagnosis?”

“And assist? If it is. Which I'm sure it is, I've heard only good things about you Dr Price.”

Dr Price smiles,

“Well that's very kind of you I'm sure. Actually it's not so much assist as lead. I've never done an abdominal before.”

Dr Lecter wags his head a little, just a small twist and then a slight curl of a smile.

“Well. I think we can manage that. Now? Are you the brother? Or husband perhaps?”

Will shakes his head,

“No Sir, just an observant bystander. Dr Price thought I might fill you both in on some of the symptoms I've noticed the last few days. I'm a mechanic. We're all about diagnosis too.”

The two doctors look at him both with an air of mild surprise. Jim Price laughs and pats Will on the arm. Hannibal follows the trail of his hand, it's clear that Dr Price likes the fellow.

“Mr Graham has probably saved the girl's life. I think the parents were reluctant to bother me. But he had no such quibble. Will you come?”

“I'll get my bag and coat and then perhaps, Mr Graham did you say? Perhaps Mr Graham will fill us in?”

……

On the walk back to the hospital Jim Price smiles to himself just a little, Dr Lecter asks some astute questions, Will Graham answers concisely and clearly, rarely repeating himself and showing a great depth of insight and compassion. He looks at him and asks.

“That's more than just observant my dear fellow. You've actually captured her whole experience in just a few short sentences. That's some gift.”

Will shrugs,

“Not always a gift. Seeing like that. The other thing too.”

Dr Price nods agreement and turns back to Dr Lecter halting him on the final gangway.

“Mr Graham and I think there's something afoot. But neither of us know what. Maybe the father. He's a little obstructive. You understand.”

Dr Lecter nods and looks back at Will appraisingly and with no small measure of appreciation,

“I can see how it might be a challenge. All those things crowding up in your head, no room for your own?”

Will looks at him then, making the eye contact that Jim Price had noted he avoided.

“Is that what you think?”

They're interrupted by the arrival behind them of Mr Zeller, another two stewards and the whole Hobb’s family including Abigail pale and pained lying covered on a stretcher. Dr Price gets them all into the ship’s hospital. And his Matron takes over, settling and reassuring the patient and the parents. Dr Price watches as Dr Lecter slips from being affable and enquiring into a more professional persona and slowly slowly they work through the initial diagnosis.

Within half an hour Mr Graham and the Hobbs parents are waiting in the main room of the hospital and all the medical team have whisked Abigail off into the tiny operating room. Dr Price leaves Mrs Hobbs quietly crying, worried for her daughter, and maybe more. He wonders if he might get a chance to speak with her alone later.

When he and Dr Lecter come back Mrs Hobbs is still dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, whilst Mr Hobbs is sitting with his head in his hands and Will is leaning against a wall, eyes closed and head back against it. An appealing fellow thinks Dr Price and then coughs to attract everyone's attention.

“She's alright. And jolly good that you alerted us today. Or we'd have had a lot more trouble. And very lucky we had Dr Lecter aboard. He's the one who saved her.”

Louise Hobbs hiccups and cries louder and Mr Hobbs gets up slowly and shakes first Dr Lecter’s and then Dr Price’s hand.

“Thank you both. We're very grateful. Can we see her yet?”

“Come back in a bit. She's resting now. She was very brave. You can be proud of her.”

Mr Hobbs nods.

“Oh. We are.”

Dr Price smiles again and watches as Mr Graham leans forwards and shakes Dr Lecter’s hand.

“Thank you Sir.”

He turns and smiles at Dr Price.

“And you Sir. You've been beyond kind. You thoroughly deserve your reputation.”

Dr Price laughs.

“Nice to know it’s deserved today. Well then. I think Dr Lecter should be allowed back to his family and Mrs Hobbs I think you need some tea, Mr Zeller will see to that. I'll just call him back.”

He goes to the small side phone and calls the stewards’ room. It looks like they might all wait until Hannibal Lecter collects his coat and then smiles at Jim Price.

“I'm glad you asked. Perhaps a drink later? In the main bar?”

Dr Price smiles in delight and nods.

“8pm. Good. Thank you.”

Dr Lecter smiles and then turns back to Will.

“Mr Graham I'd be interested in talking to you about what you said earlier about diagnostics, if you would?”

Will blinks at him and Dr Price watches him put his glasses back on. He looks mildly apprehensive, though Jim Price isn't quite sure why. When the two men leave he turns back to the Hobb’s parents and gives no more mind to it, though he might ask Dr Lecter later. Very courteous to offer a drink like that. Really, quite a gentleman. Well, alright. A Count. But a title and manners don't always accompany one another.

Chapter 2

In the corridor Hannibal Lecter guides Will Graham along from the ship's surgery to the first class deck. They pass through second class and Hannibal slowly becomes aware of a number of eyes following their progress. He turns to Will.

"Shall we have coffee? It's still early and I imagine most will be occupied with breakfast, but at least one of the lounges will be open."

Will makes a small face.

"Kind of you. But I'm not entirely sure that I'd be permitted. Even accompanying you."

Hannibal nods in understanding, it's probably true. Tiresome, but true.

"The deck then? Surely no one could object to that?"

"Possibly not. I think it's raining. So I'm sure that would be considered adequate punishment for such a transgression."

He smiles a little, and then glances up and catches Hannibal's eye.

"Sorry, if it's any consolation you'd be glared at in steerage."

Hannibal looks at him quizzically.

"Really? I had no idea."

"Inverse snobbery? Oh yes. Especially on a liner like this. We all find comfort in knowing when the barricades are safely erected and manned."

"Not you though?"

"I'm like a ghost. I walk through walls."

Hannibal considers him further, more intrigued than ever, and yes, if he was scrupulously honest more than a little attracted too. By Mr Graham's curls, his slight smile, his soft eyes, behind glasses once again.

"Well, what about the starboard side? We would at least be sheltered from the rain there."

Will laughs.

"Alright. Why not? What did you want to ask? I can tell you are somewhat dogged."

Hannibal thinks for a moment.

“It's true. I do like to get what I want. I can be quite persistent like that. And, at this moment I'd like nothing more than a decent cup of coffee and a conversation. With you. If you are amenable.”

Will shrugs,

“Come on. I'm sure we can find somewhere and you can browbeat a steward, into getting what you want.”

“And you?” Hannibal pauses, “can I browbeat you a little?”

Will makes a small noise which isn't quite an objection.

“I think you already have.”

……

The seats they find on the starboard deck are under an outside set of stairs, set back just a little. They're dry, even if it is rather cold and they are a somewhat exposed there. A sharp salt laden breeze ruffles Will’s hair and Hannibal discovers he has some difficulty in not reaching out to smooth it down and off his face.

“So, the girl. What did you say?"

Will lets out a breath he wasn't quite aware he was holding.

“Apart from the pain? She's sweet. A little naive. No siblings. But she's made some friends with some of the other girls. There's a little group of them, all long dark hair and wind chaffed cheeks. Very future of America. But there is something worrying her. Her and her mother I think.”

“The father?”

Will makes a noncommittal noise.

“I've tried not to push it. They’d just be annoyed. The parents. Or worse.”

Hannibal slowly nods his agreement.

“I suppose, yes. I can see how that might be. And you simply decided she needed help?”

“I suppose that too. The fact that she was clearly ill made it possible to say something.”

Hannibal looks up then, distracted by a steward just stopped in front of them, requesting his attention.

“Oh. I'm sorry sir. I didn't recognise you. Can I help at all?”

He flicks a glance over Will who says nothing and who looks steadily just over the man's shoulder. Hannibal turns to Will.

"Coffee? With a little brandy in it."

He is pleased by Will's answering nod and looks back to the steward.

"Two cups of coffee it is then. Make them a decent size will you? And the '88 cognac for preference. And could you find some bread rolls and cold cuts or cheese? Made up? Thank you."

The Steward gawks a little so Hannibal looks enquiringly at him.

"Breakfast you understand? We were assisting Dr Price."

This gets the Steward moving, he nods hastily, throws a troubled look towards Will and makes a sharp departure. Hannibal frowns after him and then looks back to Will to see him with an expression of great amusement across his face.

"I did warn you."

Hannibal sighs.

"I suppose you did. Ridiculous. So, that's the girl. What about you?"

They spend the next hour in conversation interrupted three times by the steward, first to bring them their drinks and food, then to clear, and finally to relay a written note from Mischa Lecter. Hannibal takes it with a smile directed at Will, waving the steward off.

"My sister. Probably wondering where I am, and if everything has gone satisfactorily."

He reads the note.

"As I thought. Mr Graham. Thank you. I've enjoyed this conversation very much. Might you be willing to repeat it?"

"The gist of it? Or the just of it?"

Hannibal smiles, broadly.

"Very good. The latter. Perhaps later? Though I have promised my sister an afternoon of some awful game, and I shall see Dr Price this evening. Perhaps tomorrow?"

"If you like. Perhaps you'll risk steerage? See how we minions live?"

Hannibal huffs a small noise.

"I assure you, I have had all kinds under my knife and on my table."

Will nods, smiles a little.

"I'm sure you have. After lunch tomorrow? So you get a lie in?"

If Hannibal were not more refined he might consider rolling his eyes at that.

They agree a time and place and Hannibal watches Will walk away. He feels a faint pang. Wishing the journey longer than just the eight days promised. Though if Mr Graham is heading for Baltimore. He shakes himself. This won't do. Will Graham has simply been cooperative and possibly feeling obligated after Hannibal's services.

……

The late morning and early afternoon is spent in frivolous conversation and the learning of several card games that Mischa has picked up from someone or somewhere. Her maid, Miss Bloom joins in as required but otherwise attends to various small matters of laundry, mending, and what Hannibal thinks of as general fussing. Mischa waits until Alana has gone to her own tiny cabin before leaning closer to her brother.

“Alana said. About the young man. Be careful Hannibal. You liked him didn't you?”

Hannibal lays down a pair of cards and looks at his sister.

“He is interesting and intelligent.” He pauses, “And well put together. Not charming. But with personality.”

She doesn't say anything, but turns a card from the pile and adds it to her hand, frowns, considers, and then lays one down on the discard pile.

“There could be trouble. For him, I mean. People are very intolerant.”

He swaps out a card of his own and lays down three, replacing them.

“In steerage? Or in general?”

“Both of course. But with different punishments. People can be quite beastly. I imagine it's close quarters down there."

Hannibal nods,

“It is. But there are cabins.”

“All the same. Don't dally with him and then abandon him. That wouldn't be kind at all.”

She deals herself some more cards.

“If you do like him? Be careful at least. Where did you take coffee?”

“On the starboard deck.”

She laughs then,

“Really? Oh well. At least that's moderately sensible. I hope no one paid too close attention? Hannibal?”

He mulls it over,

“Possibly the steward.”

“See? That will get round very fast indeed. They'll keep an eye on him now. Check he isn't where he ought not to be. Hannibal really. What were you thinking?”

"Very well. I shall be more circumspect."

She lays down two more cards.

"You're off your game. That's me. You shall pursue it? Or him?”

He pauses and looks at his own cards, she's right. As she so often is.

……..

In the evening James Price has changed, his shirt, his tie, and his jacket, though he is as affable as ever. Hannibal finds himself warming to the good sense and genial compassion of the man. Though there are some astute observational skills there too.

"So, I think she is comfortable enough. But the mother scuttled off before I could get a word to her about any other matter. Did you ask Mr Graham?"

Hannibal takes a small mouthful of his post prandial port.

"I did. He considers it something to do with the little coterie of girls in steerage of which Miss Hobbs is a part. And unfortunately, possibly something to do with the father."

Jim Price sighs.

“God I hope not. Not in these close quarters. If Hobbs is messing with these girls they'll have his guts for garters. How close is Will Graham to it do you think?”

He takes a sip of his own drink and Hannibal watches him savour it carefully. A prudent man as well as everything else.

“I thinks he's kept out of it. Just noticed.”

“He's a noticing kind of chap I think. I liked him.”

Hannibal pauses, for all that he likes Dr Price there are some confidences that may not be shared.

“Yes? Interesting I thought. Well read.”

“Yes?”

“Apparently so. Good with words.”

Hannibal wonders if something has shown in the fondness of his tone perhaps or his choice of phrase when Jim Price smiles into his glass.

“James?”

The doctor looks up. A pleased expression on his face.

“Oh I know. Cross class camaraderie? Not done!”

He snorts.

“My closest companion on the line has always been one of the stewards. He's not even a senior. But we've always seen eye to eye. He's excellent company.”

He pauses, and carefully doesn't look at Hannibal.

“I'm very fond of him.”

The two doctors drink further down their glasses. Hannibal waves a hand idly to a steward ordering a second round of drinks for the pair of them. Dr Price puts up only the smallest of protests.

By the end of the third and fourth glasses of fortified wine their burgeoning friendship has been somewhat consolidated. Finally, when Dr Price stretches and rolls his shoulders he sighs a little.

“I should go. Last check on my patient. Make sure she's settled for the night. Maybe check on her parents too. Reassure them.”

He pauses.

“Do you want to come with me?”

Hannibal is about to dissemble, citing the warm embracing fug of the cigar-smoke wreathed lounge bar and the effects of the port when he catches at what may be behind the doctor’s words,

“Yes. Alright. Lead on.”

……

Abigail Hobbs is sleeping comfortably in the small recovery room, her only companion in the hospital a second class passenger who may or may not have tonsillitis. Miss Katz speaks quietly to Dr Price and smiles at Hannibal Lecter.

“She's doing very well. Just sleeping now. I had a few words with her earlier. The ether left her a little sick but she's alright.”

They leave the darkened room, lit only by a low light by which the nurse can read. A quiet kind of vigil.

The two men track the path down into third class that Dr Price had followed in the morning. For some reason Hannibal had expected more noise down here, but it's quiet, just a

murmured card game in one corner, someone making tea over a small spirit stove, clearly not permitted because of the fire risk but tolerated at this late hour. A young father walking round with a quietly grizzling baby. Eventually they come to the corridor off which the Hobbs family have a small cabin, the door is open and Dr Price leans into the doorway. Mrs Hobbs is there, brushing her hair. Grateful for the news they have.

Hannibal looks around, up ahead he can see a small group of girls who are watching him and Jim Price carefully. Considering. He smiles slightly and then asks,

“Are you friends of Miss Hobbs?”

One of the girls detaches herself from the group.

“Have you seen her? Is she alright? We've heard nothing at all down here. Someone said they thought they cut her? Is she dead?”

Hannibal indicates Jim Price.

“This is Dr Price. We operated on her this morning. There's every chance she will be fine.”

The girls smiles,

“I'm Marissa. We've been friends since we was little. I'm glad she's alright. Can we see her?”

“Tomorrow. She's sleeping now. We've just come from the hospital.”

One of the other girls asks after Abigail and Marissa rejoins them with only a brief glance back at the two men.

Hannibal looks around, he and Dr Price are mostly ignored by the few people still up and walking the corridors down here. But he's pleased when Will Graham rounds a corner, shirt sleeves rolled up, collar undone, no jacket and a towel around his neck. He raises both eyebrows and a hand in greeting.

“Dr Lecter? Oh. And Dr Price? Is everything alright with Miss Hobbs?”

“Nothing to worry about. We've just come from there Dr Price thought her mother would be glad to have an update.”

“And you came along to sight-see?”

Hannibal smiles a little.

“Well perhaps.”

Will eyes him, and then, seeming to come to some decision he asks.

“I can't offer you very much by way of a drink. And you and Dr Price may have already had an enjoyable evening of it. But I can manage some tea? If you'd like?”

Hannibal glances back at where Dr Price has now sat himself on a chair just in the doorway of the Hobbs' cabin and is talking to Mrs Hobbs and the small group of girls.

“I think Dr Price is now occupied, but I'll take you up on the offer, if I may?”

“Alright then. Come with me. Don't get lost. I'll get us some cups first.”

He ducks into his own cabin, smiling up at Hannibal's curious glance round the room from the doorway.

“Tiny isn't it? It’s big enough though. They've been clever with the storage and fixings. Here, will you take them?”

He holds out two mugs by their handles and then digs out a tea tin and another smaller tin.

“Evaporated milk. Not perfect, but I've no lemon, unless you'd like it black?”

“Black would be fine.”

Will returns the tin to the small trunk and locks it again. Hannibal just looks, but Will replies.

“Really? No one would take anything, but it's kinder not to leave the temptation there for anyone. Don't you think?”

“I saw one of the passengers with a stove. Do you have one?”

“No. But I know someone who does. In one of the storage areas. They've got some men looking after the bulkier bits of fancy luggage.”

Hannibal looks at him quizzically,

“Cars! There are cars on board. Lovely ones. I've been talking to a few of the chauffeurs. Looking over the engines. Learning new models. They've got a neat set up. Few bunks, a stove, books. It's cosy. Would you like to see?”

Hannibal nods, amused by the light in Will’s eyes, and as they walk along the passageways going deeper and further into the belly of the ship Will turns to him and asks,

“I didn't think to ask earlier. Do you have a car?”

“In Baltimore? Yes.”

Will turns and looks at him and Hannibal feels himself flush warm when Will smiles into his eyes, less guarded than he's been before.

“Really? In Baltimore? Please! Let me see it? When we land? Could I?”

Hannibal touches his arm,

“I'd be glad if you did. Of course.”

He's rewarded with the sweetest and happiest smile he could imagine.

“Oh that's just perfect. Thank you. Very much. I really appreciate it.”

Hannibal is slightly dizzy with it when he says.

“It would be my pleasure.”

……

Chapter 3

In the large baggage compartment three small groups of chauffeurs, ship's mechanics and assorted hangers on are playing games of cards. Will is greeted with humour and an invitation to join in where he likes. He encourages Hannibal to follow him to a small group of uniformed men whom he introduces, explaining Hannibal's presence casually,

"Dr Lecter. He saved the Hobbs girl this morning, he had a mind to see what he's missing out on in respect of cars. That's alright isn't it?"

"That dark haired girl? That's a good job then. What was the matter?"

Will smiles as Hannibal explains the basics of the case, not with a swagger but with a kind of quiet competence that Will can't help but appreciate. One of the other men nods and asks,

"What do you have Sir? By way of a car?"

Will thinks Hannibal is trying for modest when he says,

"An Oldsmobile. I don't drive it as much as I should."

One of the men looks somewhat shocked,

"You don't have a chauffeur?"

He doesn't look at Will but Will wonders if they think he's angling for a new position, well, it hadn't occurred to him but that wouldn't be such a terrible outcome after all. Hannibal smiles, leans a little in to the group of men and says conspiratorially,

"We do from time to time, but I enjoy it. And, truth be told it does mean I get to keep an eye on my sister."

All the men laugh, the common cause of older doting brothers worried for their younger and precious siblings. One of the men waves them off and Will makes a bee-line for the kettle on a small spirit stove first. He offers the tea caddy round and is mostly rejected bar one or two casually waved mugs.

Once he's made several cups of black tea he hands one of his original mugs over to Hannibal,

"Would you really like to see, or were you being polite?"

He's pleased when Hannibal simply says,

"Show me."

Will knows he gets over enthusiastic about cars, their mechanics, the developments in engines and petroleum and other fuels, but Hannibal just seems to lap it up and it leaves Will

feeling giddy and knowledgeable and appreciated for his genuine skill and understanding. He undoes the catch on the hood of a late model Chrysler.

“Look at this? Easier to fix than a sewing machine. Lovely piece of work isn’t it?”

“I shall certainly ensure you come and drive the Olds when you’re settled.”

Will pauses then and lets out a breath,

“I’m sorry. I know I get a bit carried away. You don’t have to. You’ve already been more than courteous.”

Hannibal smiles again and lays a hand on his arm and is about to speak when Will looks down at it and then back up into Hannibal’s face, a look of enquiry and perhaps dawning realisation that he’s missed something.

“Oh.”

Hannibal lets go of his arm and rushes in,

“I apologise Mr Graham. I let myself get..”

He doesn’t finish, Will looks around, trying not to draw attention to themselves, but also aware of the tension that has entered their interactions for the first time.

“Dr Lecter? It’s.. Listen, it’s not unwelcome, just, this isn’t exactly the place or..”

He stops then, also aware that he might have just taken several giant steps over an invisible line. He relaxes though when he sees Hannibal also take a considered breath.

“You’re right. Of course.”

Will watches him look around, and then laughs quietly.

“If you’re thinking some of these cars are awfully roomy can I just say we’ve had six ship-board romances down here the last two nights looking for some privacy! Most of them are locked. Though I admire your quick thinking.”

He looks at Hannibal again.

“Is this something... are you... I’m not expressing this very well.”

He pulls his glasses off his face; unhooking one arm from behind each ear, then polishes them whilst he tries to think of some way of making some kind of offer without making either a fool of himself or sounding far too demanding beyond the limits the situation permits. He frowns, but Hannibal interjects.

“I’m not planning on losing you once we get to New York.”

They look at each other seriously. Hannibal perhaps surprised at the level of conviction and certainty he has somehow wound himself into, Will wondering if such things really can happen, and if they can, how it is they might happen to him.

“You can't mean that? You barely know me.”

He puts his head on one side, rubs at his glasses again then looks up through his lashes at the doctor, Hannibal looks nothing but earnest.

“I realise. But. Something.. I’m not sure if I can quite explain.”

Will doesn’t try to help him out too much, and simply lets Hannibal try for the words. Will suspects he is used to being far more articulate and incisive. He glances round and then lays a hand on Hannibal’s wrist.

“I’m listening.”

Hannibal frowns and sighs.

“At home.. at home in Lithuania, our parents died. They were always incredibly happy together. When I look at you, you look back the way my mother looked at my father. Enquiring, interested, thoughtful, full of affection and consideration. It was my earliest model for love. I can’t help but be moved by it.”

Will nods, he can see it, in his mind’s eye.

“I understand. You look at me like you think I have something to say that’s worth listening to. That you would enjoy a conversation.”

Hannibal nods slowly, and his voice is both lower and quieter, and maybe a little rougher when he says.

“I should be honest though. That is not all I would enjoy.”

Will watches him carefully.

“Not just a platonic ideal then? Or a Socratic dialogue or two?”

The small smile flirting on the outer contours of Hannibal’s face gradually broadens.

“You never cease to amaze me.”

Will huffs a small laugh,

“Don’t worry. The feeling is entirely mutual.”

He smiles when Hannibal flushes.

“I believe that is so.”

Will smiles, nudges at Hannibal with his hip, just a little,

“Still doesn’t mean the cars are at all useful to us. But let’s walk a bit. Tell me a bit more about your practice in Baltimore. And your sister? She’s with you isn’t she? Dr Price said something.”

They spend the next hour or so walking the poop deck. One of the engineers winks at Will when they leave the luggage area as though to commend his buttering up of a first class passenger. Will knows it would be a different story if they actually knew the tenor of his and the doctor’s conversation. Well, maybe he shouldn’t make assumptions. But, probably.

There’s hardly anyone around to see their stroll along the deck. One or two passengers on some nocturnal jaunt, a steward whom Hannibal thinks he recognises as Dr Price’s friend, and a few people whose role or status is somewhat ambiguous in the shadows. And even in the chill of the night there’s a certain romance to it.

Towards the rear of one of the companionways they find a bench not dissimilar to the one they’d sat on just this morning past. Will makes no demur when once they are sat in the shadows Hannibal tips his chin a little and then kisses him. Will is more than pleased with the noise Hannibal makes when Will opens his mouth, licks into Hannibal’s and then presses himself against his side.

When they pull apart both of them are somewhat dishevelled and Hannibal looks beyond astonished. Will smiles at him.

“Did you think I’d be reluctant?”

“I thought you might take more persuading.”

“For some things. Here. Now. But not for this. This we can manage I think. Though.. If I may be so forwards I’d rather know your Christian name than call you ‘Dr Lecter’ when next I kiss you.”

Will is delighted by the start Hannibal gives, perhaps unaware that his name has yet to be uttered between them.

“Hannibal. So. Albeit my baptismal name, hardly a Christian one.”

Will smiles,

“Ad Portas?"

“The very same. Though I should say, in my defence, that it is a family name and I am the eighth.”

“The eighth you say?”

“Ahh. Yes. I’m a Count.”

Will eyes him somewhat dubiously.

“And there I was thinking you were just some minor medical deity.”

“And now you are teasing me.”

And Will can’t help but think to himself, no kidding, with a name like that, and a title, and whatever else goes the hell with both. He leans in to kiss Hannibal again. It is a while before he pulls back once more.

“You do know it’s incredibly late don’t you? Much as I’m enjoying this, I suspect your sister will be wondering where you are. And really, if I’m not to be viewed suspiciously then it’d be good if I went back to my cabin.”

Hannibal reluctantly nods to him, he glances round the deck, there is some fog now and the air is considerably colder.

“Are you chilled?”

Will smiles,

“That as well. But perhaps we could meet tomorrow? As per the original plan?”

“Before I waylaid you?”

“As you say. So... As we said before?”

They make their way back to the area below the grand staircase Will to go further down into the ship and forward, Hannibal to go up and aft. Hannibal does no more than lean down slightly closer to his ear and murmur to him but Will shivers. As he walks away he tries very hard not to look backwards over his shoulder to watch Hannibal ascend.

.....

The following morning Will wakes a little later than usual but not exceptionally so. He stretches out in his tiny bunk. If he puts one hand out to the left and one to the right he can reach both sides of the cabin. Still. It’s enough. Though not nearly private enough to bring Hannibal to, he smiles to himself, Hannibal, really? What a name; no, not nearly private enough to bring Hannibal here. And not only lacking in privacy it’s also potentially the kind of indiscretion that could get him in serious trouble before he’s even set foot ashore in the USA.

Ahh well, only three days to go, and if Hannibal really meant it? Well, only three days until a whole new chapter, and one that might be much more extraordinary than the one he thought he might quietly write of his life for the next few years.

.....

When Will spies Hannibal coming towards him along the deck he is first surprised and then not so much when he realises there is a young woman with him. He manages a decent sort of half bow and then shakes her hand when she extends it.

“Hannibal told me he’d met this most interesting fellow. I wanted to meet you Mr Graham. I’m not quite as nosey as my brother but it is a close run thing and I believe with two to one

we might sneak you into a lounge? What do you think? Are you willing to risk it?"

Will looks at her steadily for a moment or two, she's not naive but he wonders if she realises quite how much self-policing goes on to maintain the careful class distinctions on board, of both kinds.

"We might manage something in second? As long as we are not too obvious about it? Well, of course, you cant help but be noticed but we might be alright."

They're about to turn towards the gangway when they are hailed by Dr Price and instantly their problem is solved by the presence of a ship's man. Will is pleased that Hannibal understands the situation instantly when he smiles at him.

"Will you join us Dr Price? My sister thinks she can smuggle Mr Graham into first, but I think you're a more seasoned pirate?"

Dr Price laughs and gives Will a gentle nudge in the ribs.

"Come along. I know just the place. And really I'd like to give you a little update on our young patient. If it won't bore you Miss Lecter?"

She smiles and Will sees the echo of her brother's face about the eyes and the crease of her mouth. An attractive woman. Not conventionally pretty perhaps, but with energy and vibrancy to spare. They discuss Miss Hobb's recovery and Dr Price, with a careful eye to what he says manages to convey that he has had some confiding discussion with her mother Louise. Perhaps last night when Will and Hannibal had left him in quiet conference with her. He goes no further and Will wonders if later he might seek Dr Price out for some further discussion, should it be useful and not merely prurient.

Coffee and cake follow and are enjoyed and these are followed by a pre-lunch drink, and eventually Dr Price leaves the small group to their own devices, their collective right to be seated together established eventually by the simple passage of time and currency of the doctor's presence.

Mischa Lecter smiles at Will.

"Well, that has all worked out nicely. I admit I wanted the challenge. Travelling by liner is all very well but I'm sorry to say I am somewhat tired of it already."

Will smiles at her,

"Even though we are half way there"

"Really? I suppose. I believe I have lost count."

He smiles at her as he puts down the small glass of impeccably dry sherry he's half finished too fast and is now determined to savour as its consumption will probably conclude their gathering. The first sitting for luncheon has already been called and he has no doubt they will soon need to depart and be seated.

“Southampton, Cherbourg, a day at sea and here we are. Half way. More than that, some time this afternoon.”

She laughs.

“I believe you. And in that case it means the Captain’s party is this evening.”

She turns in her small armchair and looks at her brother and smiles a somewhat reckless smile when she says.

“You know, if you spoke to the tailor we might get Mr Graham some gear for this evening and have him along with us. There’s such a dearth of young men with whom to dance in first.”

He can’t help but smile. She thinks she fancies herself a fairy godmother and he a Cinderella, she shall wave a magic wand, recite a short spell and just like that he shall go to the ball. He’s about to shatter the fantasy like a glass slipper when he catches Hannibal’s thoughtful look.

“Hannibal! Really. It’s not possible. Don’t even think of it. I assure you.”

Hannibal pouts.

“My sister is not the only one who likes a challenge Will.”

Will sighs as Mischa Lecter claps her hands in something like glee.

Chapter 4

Mischa laughs at the expression on Will's face. "Yes, yes. Of course it's not entirely straight-forwards, but some people won't even look beyond the clothes. So as long as they are right all should be well! What do you think Hannibal? Have you anything that might be adjusted?"

She watches as Hannibal considers a moment.

"I think we shall do well for a shirt and studs. And I've a spare bow-tie of course. Trousers? Hmm. You're a little shorter than I. But we might manage it though the cut will be a little loose and old-fashioned looking. The jacket is harder. And to be honest, I'm not at all sure about the shoes."

"But the onboard tailor might have something? For the jacket? Don't you think? We should at least try."

She smiles at her brother and watches Will give up any protest, perhaps sensibly realising that with one of them he might stand a chance of holding out, but not against two.

"We should go now." She says. "Before the tailor is overwhelmed by people trying on their clothes and realising that they brought the wrong thing, or it no longer fits quite right, or that a button has been lost."

She can see the thought cross Will's mind that surely someone in first could manage to replace or re-attach a button. And actually most of the ladies have a maid whom they could instruct with something as simple as that. Not so any seams that need letting in some way. Or re-figuring. Though Miss Bloom does very well and has her portable hand-cranked machine in her cabin. Just in case of emergency.

"Hannibal?"

"Mischa? Oh. I beg your pardon, I'm still considering the issue of shoes. Maybe Dr Price? I'll ask him. He might at least have some ideas."

When Mischa stands from the chair upon which she had been lounging she manages the feat of pulling both Will and Hannibal along in her wake, plus a hapless steward whom she commandeers to go back to her cabin to fetch a dress shirt, the four pairs of dress trousers for the evening that are unpacked so they can find the best fit, as well as the jackets that compliment them.

She laughs over her shoulder at Hannibal and Will as the steward races away perhaps encouraged by the generous tip he is now clutching in his white gloved hand.

"Mischa, why don't you take Will? I'll find Dr Price and join you at the tailors in short order. Will? Would that be alright."

Will makes a somewhat feeble gesture, and any doubts he might have are further vanquished by the onslaught of Mischa's brilliant smile.

"Now Mr Graham, don't fall at the second hurdle. You're doing so well after all."

She laughs at the face he makes at her brother, but he follows her closely and she knows she has at least a small victory to celebrate.

.....

The tailor is, to her mind, surprisingly friendly and helpful. Though she does remind herself that of course he and his two assistants are in the employ of the liner's parent company. He tuts over Will's current clothes, but he isn't deeply unkind or unpleasant. Once Hannibal's things are brought along he brightens considerably.

Mischa laughs when she is turned out of the fitting room so that Will might be measured more closely. She hears the tailor's running commentary and smiles to herself about how clever they're being. When her brother arrives she sees he has a parcel done up in brown paper and string.

"Dr Price has two pairs of dress shoes. And was willing. I think they'll do, they're certainly too small for me."

She nods, and then asks quietly.

"Have you spoken with the Captain about tonight? Is it alright?"

"I have. And it is. I mentioned the Hobbs girl. He was rather grateful to have avoided a death on board, so, at least for this evening Crawford will turn a blind eye. He did mention about the clothes but I could at least reassure him on that point. How are they getting on in there?"

Mischa is about to make some comment about hedgehogs when Will appears before them, the tailor's assistant has pinned both the jacket and trousers to show where they will make some tucks and adjustments. Even in borrowed clothes Will looks rather fine, and the appreciation of both Lecter siblings shows in their faces.

"I was going to say I hope being a human pin cushion is worthwhile, but you both look suitably impressed."

He pauses as though expecting a comment, Mischa hurriedly says.

"That was a tailoring pun wasn't it? Oh very good Mr Graham, you are both useful and ornamental."

He blinks at her and she wonders if he is at all familiar with the somewhat socialist inclined work of William Morris.

"I see you have news from somewhere then Miss Lecter."

And she couldn't be happier. He smiles then.

“If you’re quite content I’ll go and de-peacock, and let the fellow carry on with everything. Apparently we got in just in time, there’s now something of a rush. The assistant thinks too many people have fed too well these last few days.”

Hannibal beckons Will closer and gets him to turn.

“I think this will do very well. Well done Mischa. Several good ideas here.”

Will doesn’t roll his eyes. He’s too polite for that, though it’s quite possible he thinks it.

.....

Mischa tries very hard to persuade Will to take a late luncheon with them and Hannibal is amused at how these two somewhat stubborn individuals lock horns and battle it out. Will wins, and Mischa manages not to pout. When Will has gone she turns to her brother as she tucks her hand into his elbow,

“I do like him. Very much. Even if he is as determined as a clam.”

Her brother raises his eyebrows,

“A clam?”

“Oh you know. Keeps everything all closed away, only opens up if he thinks there is fair weather or something interesting drifting by.”

“You do not think he is more practical than that?”

“I think he is both practical and fanciful, and rather clever besides. And quite a match for you.”

She pauses and squeezes her brother’s arm,

“I do mean that. I think he’s absolutely right. Have you spoken to him more seriously. This isn’t just a shipboard thing is it? Is it?”

“It isn’t. and yes. I did say something to him yesterday. He is already headed to Baltimore for a work opening. I think. Well..”

She looks at him eagerly, really, once she had got used to her brother’s more rarefied predilections she’s been rather excited about anyone he’s shown more than a passing interest in.

“Yes? Go on? What?”

“I suggested he might like to come and drive the Olds.”

“Oh Hannibal! You’re hopeless. Unless. Is that some kind of euphemism I don’t know about?”

He laughs.

“No. No it isn’t. And if it were I’m not sure I would say such a thing in front of you!”

She pouts,

“Don’t be silly. How can I avoid anything scandalous if I don’t know what scandal to avoid?”

There is a certain irrefutable logic to this that Hannibal cannot find it in himself to deny.

“Mischa, my darling, shall we eat lunch. Not worry about what Will does or doesn’t anticipate beyond this journey, nor what I do or don’t either?”

“Hannibal? Are you worried? You’re not worried are you? He certainly likes you.”

He smiles at her,

“Yes. I believe he does.”

.....

In the early evening there is a knock on the Lecter’s cabin door and Miss Bloom opens it, she doesn’t really make eye contact with Will Graham though Mischa can see from the back that she’s radiating disapproval. Mischa will have to put a stop to that if anything does come of this liaison between the two men. And she certainly hopes it shall. For all that Hannibal is successful and well respected she believes him to be lonely. And no matter how many careful dinners and subtly worded invitations no man has ever lasted more than one or two encounters in their home. At least that she is aware of. She hopes, so very much, that Will Graham is different.

He certainly looks beautiful. He’s closely shaved and she wonders if he has had his hair cut at some point this afternoon, the curl is more pronounced but it’s also tidier. When Miss Bloom moves aside he comes into the cabin a little shyly.

“I’m so glad you found us. Did anyone trouble you on the way?”

“I was fortunate, the steward I asked for directions is a friend of Dr Price. He was most accommodating and very helpful.”

“That’s good. And I think I’m allowed to say you do look rather splendid.”

She turns as her brother enters the small ante-room and sees the look of besotted devotion on his face usually reserved only for her. Perhaps with an additional edge to it? Which she wonders at, just a little, before flushing just the smallest amount at what she perceives as her own gaucheness.

“You do Will. The effect is most pronounced.”

Will smiles and looks down at himself, then at them both.

“In that case, I’m glad I shan’t let you down as you both look incredible.”

Mischa makes a happy sort of wiggle. She’s wearing her favourite evening clothes and she knows she looks a picture.

“Is it cold on deck? Do I need a wrap do you think?”

“I think you may. It wont get any warmer the later we get so, yes, I think that’s a good idea.”

She turns and smiles at Alana who ducks into her cabin to fetch something. Mischa lets her maid drape the long warm half cloak over her shoulders and then does a little twirl for the two men.

“I think we’re ready aren’t we? Shall we?”

Her brother smiles and extends an arm, and then looks at Will, who laughs and offers his arm to her as well.

“Oh good. Now I am a rose between two thorns.”

.....

The evening is one of those glittering evenings. Memorable and glorious. The menu is extraordinary, the influence of Escoffier felt in every mouthful and every sip. The music is lovely, the orchestra doing a perfect job of keeping people entertained whilst they are eating and dancing when the meal is over. Both Hannibal and Will find themselves in demand on the floor once the tables begin to empty and the ball room begins to fill up. Mischa too is required as a partner and she gaily laughs through waltzes and a fairly tame polka, and other things she doesn’t know the name of but picks up quickly from one of the young men. Of course she dances with both her brother and with Will Graham.

During one such turn she whispers to him.

“I know you can’t dance with Hannibal, not here. But would you? If it were possible?”

He doesn’t speak for a few moments, just concentrates on turning her carefully, not treading on her feet, not stumbling, he manages a small smile.

“I shall be forthright Miss Lecter. I am not sure if you know what you are asking me?”

She smiles at him,

“My brother doesn’t tell me everything. I am quite sure of that. But he does tell me an awful lot. I think I know what I’m asking. Do you?”

He nods slowly and then turns her again.

“Should I trust you Miss Lecter? So far this has all be light and fun and a pleasurable way to spend the evening. But if I speak of this, well, it is something else again. Isn’t it?”

She stops dancing and carefully pulls him to the side of the dance floor and then makes as if her shoe is paining her. She stands on one leg to adjust the buckle and holds Will's arm as she does so, just one casual hand keeping her balance, he feels the warmth of it as she says,

"I know I often speak in jest. I realise that. And I know this is a serious business. Or it could be. I don't just mean about how you feel. The emotion of it. I know the rest too. But, I hope you can trust me. I think Hannibal trusts you, which means I am inclined to do so too. And of course, trust does not always beget trust, though it can invite it? What about it Mr Graham? I invite you to trust me."

He looks at her and can see no guile in her face. Though she's also working hard at projecting as much honesty as she can.

"Alright then. On that word I shall. I would dance with him. Here, or anywhere else, if he so wished it."

She smiles,

"Well that's quite alright then. And when we get to New York? Shall you come with us then?"

"We are all going to Baltimore. That's the easy part."

She nods,

"I understand. Hannibal mentioned the car to me. How very useful."

Will smiles a little. He understands her point.

"And now I believe they are serving coffee. Shall we go back to the table? I believe Hannibal is saddled with some other tiring types. We might introduce you as a friend I think and let them draw their own conclusions."

"A suitor then?"

"Of a sort. Yes. Why not?"

.....

The rest of the evening continues much as the early part though Will is introduced to a number of well known men and women important in their own fields and families. He's somewhat bemused by the whole thing and Mischa clearly gets a huge amount of pleasure at dropping hints about Will's status as her beau. Hannibal doesn't interject but Will sees him narrow his eyes a few times. Mischa smiles back, perhaps aware that she is nudging him just slightly towards jealousy.

After the Captain has handed his wife off in the final dance almost everyone rises to join in the slowly circulating throng on the floor. Mischa sees Captain Crawford bend his wife in a graceful dip and wonders if she can persuade Hannibal to learn a few new dances. She watches as the Captain and his wife manage a few other delicate manoeuvres and she

supposes they must practice for just such an occasion as this one. She watches when one of the junior staff approaches and then rushes the captain away. Probably to some concern on the bridge or something.

She turns to her brother and is about to laugh about something he has just said when a tremendous jerk and a tearing high pitched screaming sound rends the air. People are thrown to one side by the jolt and many sprawl on the floor. There's a human scream from off to one side, then an alarm. And then it is utter chaos and she has to fight her way back to her brother's side.

And the band plays on. Determinedly.

Chapter 5

First one alarm sounds, and then another, and another. In parallel there is first a lone voice screaming against the sirens, but it's quickly joined as the ship lurches again. The noise becomes a high pitched thread of terror, a dreadful cacophony. Already people in the ballroom are clamouring for the exits.

There is another great yawning hell-some noise and a rending and wrenching sound and the whole ship lists in a great lean.

Of course the stewards know what they are supposed to do and Brian Zeller, senior on the starboard side for the passengers travelling in first, in charge of a small tam of fifteen men and women begins mustering both his juniors and the people evacuating from the dance.

Up on deck he works hard. And they've a boat away within five minutes. Five short and hectic minutes. It isn't quite full, but there are plenty of people on board. Men and women, mostly women, and a few children, snatched from sleep or at promenade with their parents.

He races between the lifeboats at the different stations, helping the women, carrying children, trying not to panic at the noise and the mayhem or at those who really shouldn't be getting on board the life boats. Not yet, not when there are children, not when there will be some from the other decks and other classes on board.

And they keep coming. All along the side. And the life boats go down, lurching into the water. Suddenly he sees Dr Lecter, half carrying his sister, shouting at her, shouting at Will Graham who has her maid, Miss Bloom, he just has time to think. They're pulling them through the crowds trying to stay close together, Will in the lee of the taller and maybe stronger man.

Brian shouts to him,

"Dr Lecter! Doctor! Dr Lecter! Over here! Sir!"

Somehow, despite the noise and the chaos and the unadulterated hell of it Hannibal hears him. He and Will carry, push, and then drop the screaming women into one of the boats as it goes over the side. Brian hears Miss Lecter scream for her brother. Her maid falls behind her in the boat and grabs for her mistress around her waist. The Countess, Brian thinks in a flash. Or some such. He looks around wildly and sees Dr Price.

"What's happening James? You should go! You can go, get in, get in. For gods sake man!"

James Price grabs his friend by the collar, shouts in his ear to be sure he hears.

"There are women and children in steerage. Older folks too. They need help. I won't leave them."

Brian tries to grab for his jacket but the doctor is gone. He hardly knows that the scream that he hears is his own.

Turning again he sees Dr Lecter and Will Graham struggling. The older, taller, stronger man is almost prevailing. But only almost. Brian can just make out the words,

“Get in the boat Will. Get in it. Please. I beg of you.”

Will is right up against the doctor.

“Abigail Hobbs! No one will care. No will remember. I won’t leave her. It’s not fair. I can’t.”

“Will! Don’t. Don’t throw the chance away. There are fewer boats below. Please. Will.”

Brian can tell it’s the wrong thing to say to him.

“Even more reason to try Hannibal. You go. They need men to row. Please. You go.”

For Brian it is as though they are at the centre of a hurricane. The quiet eye while the storm rages all around. He sees the two men embrace, perhaps even kiss and then Will is gone. And so is the boat. Dr Lecter drags his eyes to him.

“Where can I be useful?”

The next thirty minutes are filled with anguish. Children without parents. Wives without husbands. And a few women who will not leave their sons, their husbands, their lost children. And a few lone men who are brave. And a few who are not.

The boat is beginning to list even further making it hard to walk along the deck. Dr Lecter and Mr Zeller have pushed along getting people off, getting the boats away.

“They’re not full enough sir! We need more people up here.”

“What’s the capacity?”

Zeller almost cries,

“Of the Lifeboats? Half the ship? A little more. Not much.”

Hannibal whirls around, most of the boats have only been two thirds full if that and most have moved away from the sinking behemoth that is the Titanic. This will be a disaster.

“God! Who made this happen? Who?”

There is no answer to it, not now, not here,

“We have to try Sir, we must.”

It’s then that Brian sees Jimmy Price’s nurse Miss Katz, she grabs at his arm.

“They’re coming. There was a fight in the Infirmary. But they’re coming.”

Hannibal clasps her arm,

“Will Graham?”

“Miss Hobbs. And Dr Price. And Mr Graham. It was her father. It was terrible.”

She pants and almost doubles over, desperate to catch her breath, Hannibal holds her up, and then lifts her bodily over the railings of the ship.

“I’m going to drop you. Into the boat below. Ready?”

She struggles at first then realises what he means and nods urgently, never the less as he drops her she screams and falls just ten feet into the lifeboat below already being lowered.

She lands on one or two others but no one cares and they simply pull her straight. The boat hits the side of the ship as it descends, the angles wrong now for a clean launch.

And then there’s Dr Price and Will Graham carrying Abigail between them. They’re a little more gentle with her as they get her over the side, and Miss Katz is waiting with others, to reach up for her.

Brian turns back but Dr Price has gone again. He wants to scream. Does scream. But when he turns round he is in time to see Dr Lecter lift a wildly struggling Will Graham, he may have been fighting, the purplish eye and the exhausted mein suggest it’s so, but he still resists firmly.

“No, NO!”

Despite his struggles, despite his begging Hannibal gets him over the railing and holds him there just a moment.

“Find Mischa. For god’s sake find her. Please Will. For me.”

And he drops him. Below, as he lands Will has to struggle to right the boat, the men still on deck stretching at the ropes to stop it capsizing, to get it away from the ship. Those in the life boat use an oar to push off and Will is held back by others desperate to keep the boat afloat, this one almost full. He’s still shouting something. Still begging. Then an oar is pushed into his hands and Brian sees him finally set to work.

Brian reaches a hand to Dr Lecter who looks round blindly at him.

“We should help on the next deck Sir.”

There’s a terrible noise and the second stack comes unmoored, its cables screaming. The ship is on its way to breaking in half. And once that happens? God Brian thinks when did the first one go? Maybe the terrible noise before.

He grabs at the doctor’s arm again.

“Forget the second deck, it’s too late. We should get to the boat behind the bridge. They won’t launch it from there, they can’t, it’s really for show. But it will still be there. Grab anyone you can, we’ve maybe five minutes, ten at the outside.”

Hannibal looks at him in alarm. The sharp realisation washes over him, there is, after all, a very good chance he will not make it off the ship alive. He looks at the steward, the friend of James Price, the man he’s been following for the last forty minutes, trusting him.

“Alright then. Thank you.”

They struggle through people and against gravity. The angle of the ship works to hinder them and the next few minutes sees them both climb the deck, grabbing for any hand-hold. Brian finds a screaming child and hoists him over his shoulder. Hannibal gets a young woman around the waist. By the time they’ve got to the area behind the captain’s bridge there is already water lapping at their shoes.

Brian pushes against the heavy door of the bridge, its weight against him. Right there, at the bridge the captain is still trying to keep the ship afloat for as long as possible. Crowded against the corner his wife waits, weeping quietly.

Captain Crawford turns and sees Zeller and Hannibal Lecter, he recognises the doctor from earlier and Zeller he sees regularly around the upper class portion of the ship.

“You should leave, go on, if you can. Please.” He glances towards his wife. “Bella! I beg you. Please. Dr Lecter, May I ask you to look after my wife?”

Jack Crawford reaches for his wife’s hand kisses it briefly and hands her to the doctor.

“Please.”

She doesn’t reply, just returns the kiss and lets herself be pulled towards the door, she looks at the doctor.

“Dr Lecter, I don’t think I count Lazarus as one of my acquaintances, but you might be the second best thing.”

He nods to her and then at the Captain.

“I shall do my best.”

As they push through the door the water is now past their ankles, he pushes Mrs Crawford out ahead of him then turns briefly back.

“God speed Captain Crawford.”

The Captain turns back to whatever view is left from the bridge, canted now at a terrible angle, so that he has to hold onto the panel in front of him.

Zeller and Dr Lecter have to pull Mrs Crawford across the deck to the boat, as well as the child and woman they brought there are four others there. The boat won’t be even half full.

There are no others waiting, no crowd, no queue. Perhaps too few know if it, or have thought of it, or could get here through the crowd below.

Of Dr Price there is no sign and when they have managed Mrs Crawford onto the boat Mr Zeller makes to wade away, Dr Lecter stalls him,

“It’s not much of a chance but it might be the only one.”

“I won’t leave Dr Price. You should go Sir. You must try. For your sister.” He stops then and looks around, looks at Hannibal half in and half out of the boat, perhaps not undecided, but uncertain. Mr Zeller looks at him properly.

“Sir. For Mr Graham too. Please, he seems a good man.”

Hannibal lets go of his arm.

“Good luck Mr Zeller.”

“Thank you Sir.”

“Hannibal.”

“Brian”.

They shake hands. As though the world isn’t falling away from them. And then Mr Zeller pushes on the boat, undoes the mooring rope. The one for show but which keeps the lifeboat anchored to the ship, there’s enough water now on the deck for it to float. And he pushes harder, and then races across the deck and down the stairs from the bridge to the first class deck, and then below to the second.

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Down in steerage he finds James Price trying to persuade a last reluctant woman onto a boat.

“Mrs Hobbs. Please! Please! Abigail is already away. She’s saved. She is saved. Please. For the love of God. Please. Mr Graham put her on one of the first boats off.”

Mrs Hobbs dithers and then her husband grasps her arm. He is bloodied around the face.

“Come away Louise. Come away. Do you not see what they’re trying to do?”

Dr Price can do nothing as Mr Hobbs pulls his wife away from the last boat. Wordlessly he and Mr Zeller push two more children and a young woman onto the boat. When there is only a single space left Jimmy turns to his friend.

“You’re still a young man. You should take it.”

Brian pulls his friend hard by the arm towards it.

“No. You go. You’re a gifted man Jimmy, a good man.”

His friend looks at him.

“Not without you.”

Brian nods, and together they work to get the boat off and away from the ship. It’s only a matter of time. He can hardly believe they’ve had this long. When it does go the suction will pull anything in it’s wake under with it. Those folks in the last few boats had better row for their lives. And then some.

The ship leers at an even more impossible angle and Brian grabs for his friend’s hand.

“Come away Jim. Come with me. Thank you.”

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Chapter 6

Freddy Lounds, Radio Operator of the SS Carpathia slides into his chair and yawns widely. Honestly the last few hours of the watch always slow to a crawl. And, truth be told, the radio has been silent for days. Excepting, of course, the occasional chatter of a tech, or another operator just on the edge of signal range across the silence of the ice floe.

The crossing from New York is terrible. It's been bad all the way and their arrival in Fiume might be delayed. The whole route has been cold and littered with ice. The Bridge crew has hypothesised that some unseasonal weather has caused the break up and the drift is bringing everything to them. The Captain has worried. Though just for once he's been persuaded off the bridge to snatch some sleep.

Freddy stretches his back and then manages a small smile when the night watch comes through. He's all right as far as company goes. A little garrulous, but he has come with a flask of tea, two mugs and a small hip flask of something fierce.

They sit and drink and talk of inconsequentials, of things that don't matter, not really, not in the grand or even smaller schemes of things. But suited to a late evening when the light has been turned low and there is something to warm their bellies.

He glances at his watch, not the most reliable of timepieces, but a 21st birthday present from his father. Still not midnight. When he's due to finish his shift and the radio closes down for the night.

They carry on a desultory kind of conversation, joined by another man coming off shift. They get to talking cards and games of chance and wagers, and thus the journey of the Titanic running a reverse parallel route to them through the ice. A few hours away, south of them now, they guess and a little further west. Passed, as they must have done, like ships in the night.

When he looks at his watch again it's still on the same time. He shakes it, mutters under his breath, then watches the second hand come back to life and tick onwards.

"What's the time?"

He sighs when his colleague answers that it is gone midnight. He has overstayed his shift and no-one will care in the slightest. It is his responsibility alone.

He grumbles to the other two as he checks his logs, fills in a few details and gradually closes off the different parts of the various wires and knobs. He's about to turn off the radio proper when a signal comes through.

The three men look at each other and Freddy drops into his seat again and scrabbles to get the morse down on his notepad. He stares at the other two as the message repeats, once, twice, and is then cut off on the third.

He taps off a rapid staccato reply acknowledging its receipt. Stares at the radio. Not knowing if his answer has been received or not. He swears quietly.

“I have to see the Captain.” He pauses. Swallows. “That was the Titanic. They’ve been hit. They’re taking on water.”

The older man scoffs.

“I thought it was unsinkable! You must have got it down wrong.”

But Freddy knows, he knows he didn’t.

“Sure, we all thought that. Don’t touch the rig. I’ll be back.”

He checks the position. Longitude and latitude to the nth degree and heads to the Bridge.

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The Captain is not best pleased to be pulled from his bed. And Freddy isn’t surprised when he raises a sardonic eyebrow, wondering if the young operator has perhaps been put up to it or conned. But he gets it across, it’s real, it’s real. And they’ll have to divert from their course. They could be upwards of four hours away, but they’re the closest to the last known position. They have to go. A m’aidet at sea? It’s the rule of every maritime law and code.

It might be costly in lots of ways but they have to.

Freddy’s sent back to the radio room, and the two men are there still, all agog and wide eyed, waiting for him.

“The Captain believed me. We’re diverting. I have to keep trying for them. Until we’re closer. You could both go, no need to stay really.”

“I ain’t going nowhere. This is history mate.”

They hear the sound of the engines. Louder. Getting up steam. They’ll be turning round. Trying.

They wait. And every five minutes he tries the radio, on the emergency frequencies and on the ones in the International Maritime Register, the ones logged for the Titanic. He tries ten times in the first hour, again in the second and third, and into the fourth.

When the Carpathia’s foghorn sounds he tries once more. There is only emptiness, the sound of nothing, barely even static on the line. Not even the sixth sense operators have, all tingling, just before the tape ticks, or the morse clicks through. There’s nothing. He looks at the other two men.

“We should get on deck. They’ll need all hands.”

Soberly his colleague answers.

“If there are survivors.”

“Yes. If there are.”

They all pause. No one would survive the water itself and even a few hours of exposure could easily kill children or the elderly or anyone ill. Anyone really if they were underdressed. Hypothermia is a terror to all sailors this far north. A real and present danger.

Freddy pulls on his coat, and a muffler and cap, then his gloves.

“We should find out.”

Up on deck it’s already all business.

“Lifeboats.” One of the stewards rushing past shouts. “There are boats. Come on.”

There is a boat being pulled up. Just one. Not the first to be launched from the Titanic they explain. But the two men aboard had rowed hard for an hour to get away from the wreck. It’s only half full, less, a third perhaps. They take only 28 people off, but all are taken below and then find themselves interrogated hard for details. Despite their cold and exhaustion they try. They try.

Passengers on the Carpathia are marshalled to lend clothes and blankets from their cabins. Freddy runs around checking that no one is left uncloaked. He gives up his muffler to a child from this first boat. The Captain designates different spaces across the ship to receive those that they find. First class and any servants all together, second in an adjacent room and steerage passengers in a different part of the ship.

On this first boat it’s a mix of first and second class passengers, mostly women and children and the two men who had been included in order to man the oars. There are two lady’s maids as well. Both with their mistresses.

No one has died on the boat but they are all badly chilled and the child Freddy gave his muffler to is in a bad way. The doctor of the Carpathia sets up an impromptu sick bay for anyone suffering any ill effects. There are plenty of bruises and sprains.

Then there’s a quiet. Distress from the passengers below describing their losses, not quite counting their gains. But up above? On deck. Silence over the water. Everyone listens hard, for whistles, or any cry. The foghorn is sounded again.

The second boat isn’t found for another twenty minutes. But thereafter it’s a steady discovery, another boat every ten minutes or so. Twenty of them, more or less. And though everyone is relieved more of the boats are emptier. And more of them contain someone who hasn’t survived the cold.

Freddy doesn’t stop. He hands out coffee, comforts those who have lost themselves to weeping, shock and misery settling amongst them all. He finds an older man, from second class, wandering aimlessly until he finds the man’s adult daughter together with his wife. The

moment of joy at this reunion is one he thinks will have to carry him through the rest of the night. And beyond.

Mischa Lecter and her maid Alana Bloom are pulled aboard a little over four hours after the Titanic went down. Both of them huddled in Mischa's fur cloak, a small child without parents clinging to them. No one knows who he is and Mischa won't give him up. Freddy helps them below, carrying the child.

"You keep hold of him. Doesn't matter what class he is. Keep him with you. Lie if you have to. No reason he should lose you too."

She nods sharply to him.

"The survivors. How many? My brother? Our friend? How will we know?"

He nods in reply. Not the first time he's been asked. And for all that the Captain is doing well in the circumstances, heroically really, it's still chaos.

"Upwards of 700. Passengers and crew. First class? You might find them here. Otherwise. It depends."

Mischa understands. Hannibal won't hesitate to come and find her. If he has made it off the ship. She shies away from the horror of that thought. Surely she would know if he hadn't, would feel something?

"My brother yes. What about the steerage passengers? Where are they?"

Freddy looks at her sadly.

"Fewer I'm afraid. But there are still some coming aboard. They're being lodged down below. People are doubling up. Woman?"

She shakes her head slowly.

"Man."

His face falls.

"Ahh. I'm sorry. Fewer men still."

He gently covers her hand with his, unthinkable in normal circumstances. But these are anything but.

"Tell me his name. I shall try and find out for you."

"Will. He's Will Graham. Please."

"All right. I'll come back and tell you. You warm enough? I can get another blanket."

"I think I never shall be again. But yes, for now. Thank you."

He gives them a small look, checks where they are so that he might find them later and is gone to look, though his hope is a small one. She will be fortunate indeed if even her brother has survived.

Down below where the steerage passengers have been lodged he makes his way through the melee. Women, children, a few scattered men. Really, he thinks they are all scattered. And though he's not given to fancifulness he wonders if they will ever pull together again after this. He begins to ask.

"I'm looking for Will Graham? Will Graham? Anyone know him. Seen him?"

Several people look on, turn away, their own losses too much already to bear. One woman catches him by the arm.

"I seen him. Rowing he was. I seen him. Not here. On a boat."

Freddy nods. If he made it into a boat he could be here. He can try can't he. For the woman upstairs. He carries on. Listens to a few people's tears. Tries to be reassuring. That they'll keep looking until the morning. Won't leave anyone if they can save them.

In a corner of a tiny cabin with six people all crowded in and at least warm he asks again.

"I'm looking for a Will Graham? Anyone know him. Seen him."

A dark haired man in one corner looks up, huddling a girl who looks so pale she might be dead already. His arm round another woman. Uniformed Freddy thinks. Crew from the Titanic.

"I'm Will Graham. What is it?"

He sounds tired. Exhausted. Run into the ground with nothing left.

Freddy eyes the girl he is holding, the woman too, he can get them out of here.

"Bring her. There's medical above. Can you manage her?"

The Graham fellow sighs.

"She's been ill. Dr Price operated on her. Appendicitis. She's so cold."

Freddy helps him lift her, turns to the woman.

"Come on. You're crew, you're needed."

She looks blankly at him then seems to rally a little.

"I'm a nurse."

"Good. We definitely want you then. Come on."

He pushes back through the people in the corridor, he and Will Graham carrying the girl. The nurse at their backs.

“Let us through. She’s not well. Let’s try and save her ehh?”

People part to let them pass. Up top he gets the three of them to the makeshift infirmary, they leave Miss Katz with the assistant surgeon, the Ship’s doctor frowns over Abigail and Will explains slowly what has taken place.

“Lecter? The surgeon? Good. He was on board? She’s a chance then. What of Jimmy Price? He get off?”

Will shakes his head sadly.

“I don’t think so Sir. But I don’t know.”

“Damn. He’s a good man. You did well getting her this far. Are you cold?”

Freddy interjects.

“I’ve a place for him. I’ll take him. Don’t worry.”

The Surgeon turns away, intent on what must be done to make the girl comfortable. Will clasps her hand.

“I’ll come back for you Abigail. All right? I’ll come back.”

She nods weakly. Closes her eyes again.

Freddy pulls him along and whispers confidentially in his ear.

“They’re not checking passenger lists just yet. You’re dressed for the part. I can get you to the first class survivors. If anyone queries it too closely we’ll say your either her beau or her servant. Whichever works. All right?”

Will nods. Slowly seems to wake up a little. The cold is still taking its toll. Evening dress may look the part but it’s not exactly warm despite the fine wool of the tailoring.

“Mischa? Is she?”

Freddy smiles.

“Yes. She’s alive. I can take you to her. Come on. Remember what I said. I’ll do the talking. Yes?”

In the lounge where first class passengers have been settled Freddy takes Will by the sleeve and draws him through the mattresses that have been set out for people to rest upon. No one stops them. He finds Mischa Lecter and Miss Bloom where he left them, the small boy asleep now in Miss Bloom’s lap. Miss Bloom herself leant up against a bulkhead mostly asleep too.

Mischa manages to get to her feet.

“Oh Will.”

They embrace each other tightly, and then pull back. Mischa pushes his hair off his face.

“You lost your glasses.”

He nods.

“Yes. Somewhere. It doesn’t seem to matter.”

“Hannibal?”

“I don’t know.”

Freddy watches as they embrace one another again. Maybe share some tears. He should get on. There’s still plenty to do. When Will thinks to turn and thank him he’s already gone.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Captain of the Carpathia waits for as long as possible. Through the dark hours before the dawn they send up rockets and flares. And retrieve some bodies from the water lifejacketed and frozen. Will watches as members of his crew race backwards and forwards across the lounge, onto the deck, away and then returned. He still feels numb. Not so much by the cold now but by the events of the night. And under it all as he holds Mischa Lecter close to him, leaning against a bulkhead with a thin mattress under them, he feels a deep wrenching wrecking of his own heart.

Eventually he thinks, he must have been asleep, because he wakes. There's a sad grizzle of silence around him. Dotted around the lounge there are some who simply stare, not quite fractured, and not quite present. There are those keening for a lost partner, parent, sibling or child. There are those who are already beginning to feel the first stirrings of anger, moving beyond simple grief and dismay, fear now curdling into fury.

The engines are under steam again and gradually the news spreads that they are headed for New York. Not the Azores though that would be best for the line, and not Nova Scotia, though it is the nearest, because of the ice floe.

Will accepts a cup of coffee from a crewman, clearly tired himself but dogged and determined to deliver what little comfort he can in china stamped with the liner's insignia. When Mischa stirs beneath his arm he coaxes her to drink from it too. Her sweet face is tear stained and her hair awry. Miss Bloom is still curled up in sleep the little boy sprawled beside her and Will envies them the rest. When he goes to stand Mischa hangs onto his arm.

"Don't go. Please. Don't leave, not now."

"I'm going to check on the girl, Miss Hobbs. I'll be back." She doesn't loosen her grip on his arm. "Do you want to come?"

She doesn't speak but she does stand beside him, using his arm to steady herself as she gets to her feet. Together they make their way across the lounge to the area set aside for patients under the care of the doctor. Abigail's colour has improved and she is now ordinarily asleep. The doctor wipes his hands and comes to speak with them.

"We've warmed her and I think she'll do well enough for now. The Captain says we'll make landfall in seventy-six hours or so. You know our heading now?"

Will nods.

"New York? That's right isn't it?" He pauses, glances at Mischa. "How many did you bring on board?"

“705. Off twenty boats. They’re spread around the ship. Though everyone who needed urgent care is with me here. Your Nurse Katz has been very useful. Thank you.”

Will nods, though really he doesn’t feel he can take any credit for saving anyone, except perhaps for helping Abigail, along the way.

“What will happen when we arrive? Will you want to have her hospitalised?”

The doctor wipes his hands a little more though they must be dry by now. Playing for time Will thinks.

“It’d be for the best. She’s rallying well, but she needs proper care. A few weeks to recover. The Line will take care of the bill. She shouldn’t worry about that. Did any of her family survive? I’m sorry. I didn’t ask how you know her.”

Will is about to explain when Mischa interjects.

“My brother operated on her. I’m Mischa Lecter. We felt, still feel, a modicum of responsibility for her wellbeing. I’d like to make sure she can find us after. We’re in Baltimore.”

The doctor nods.

“It’ll be hectic when we land. They know we’re on the way. I’ll make sure she knows. Will you write it out for me?”

He fishes in a pocket and finds a scrap of paper and a pencil and hands them to her. When she’s finished he folds and pockets it carefully. Nods his head to them both, and is gone. Mischa turns to Will.

“You’ll come with us won’t you? When we land. Hannibal..” She swallows hard several times. “Hannibal would want that.”

He takes her hand and draws her back to where Miss Bloom has now awoken.

“Do you want me to ask?”

She looks at him.

“Honestly. Will. I think by now, if he had survived? We would know.”

Tears fill her eyes and she leans against him, he puts his arms round her, and they both allow themselves at last to cry.

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As the doctor predicted and the Captain of the Carpathia had feared New York is a riot. The survivors are feted and the crew and Captain honoured for their prompt thinking and actions.

As they walk down the gangplank to the wooden pier, Mischa and Will keep close together, and despite some worries, she brings the boy. Miss Bloom follows tight behind. Along with others from first class they are roomed in a nearby hotel. The local owners both cashing in and compassionate towards the women and children and very few men who have come ashore.

Some of the survivors are rallying. Calling for commendations and awards, speaking of the experience, selling their stories. For some it is all that they have left to them. Some wag from the local press notes that the proportions of women, children and men survivors are the same for each class. Others publish incomplete or inaccurate lists. It is three days before Mischa manages to organise for them all to go home.

To Baltimore.

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There seems to be no question but that Will shall go with Mischa and Alana Bloom. And once arrived, there is no question but that he must stay.

He sits in Hannibal's bedroom that first night and runs a hand over the blankets and pillows. Eventually he undresses down to his undershirt and underwear and slides under the sheets. They've been laundered since the last time the family were here, but someone must have sprayed them with Hannibal's preferred cologne when they were ironed as they smell like him. Will burrows his face in the pillow and curls up on his side and tries to sleep. Closes his eyes, tries to remember how to breathe.

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Several weeks pass. And though nothing like normality resumes, something they decide they must call living does.

Reporters come and go. Lawyers arrive and chew on their moustaches and their pens. Friends and acquaintances come to gawk or sympathise, and sometimes both. Mischa manages to keep up a good appearance but in the evening she lets herself slump over, sometimes to cry, sometimes to re-run the events, as if a new telling of the story might change the outcome. Sometimes she sits in the drawing room and looks into the fire as if to see some future there. Will sits opposite her on another silk covered chair.

"What would you have me do now Mischa? No one has asked, at least not to my face, but I can't stay here indefinitely."

"Why can't you? Why not? No one has really asked. Everyone has just assumed. Some shipboard romance. Something of the like."

He looks at her.

"You'd have us pretend?"

She stares down at her feet. Placed side by side neatly on the floor. She is well shod. Everything has gone mad but her shoes match and the buckles are well sewn.

“Somewhat. We can set you up. Mechanics, cars, you know the work. It would make a kind of sense. If you’d lost your savings on the ship. Or business. I can introduce you. And you’d stay here. As my protector. As my friend. There are plenty of people now who see me as a little heiress ripe for the picking. You’d save me from that.”

He can see the point. Can understand her thinking.

“And when you eventually want to go out into society again. Want to find a husband? Someone who likes you for you not just as a survivor, or someone with a little money or a title.”

“Or all three?”

He concedes the point. So she sighs.

“I don’t want to decide now. I don’t want to rush into anything we might both regret. We don’t have to commit to any course of action yet. We survived. That ought to be answer enough for anyone. It’s still soon. What of Miss Hobbs?”

Will concedes again. He takes the point. One of the fashionable doctors has talked of the survivors experiencing a kind of lethargy they’ve been hard put to shake off. Or a kind of mania. Already two people have gambled and lost vast amounts on the New York stock exchange. Others have been seen at parties and gatherings regaling other partygoers with their daring escapades. He doesn’t put himself quite in either camp, but he can feel the pull.

“Of course we can wait. Until we both feel better. Because we will do. One day. A little. Somehow.”

She looks across the gap between their two chairs and reaches out a hand. He takes it gently. Maybe. Somehow.

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A week after this exchange Will comes slowly down the main staircase from the first floor and sees Miss Bloom walk to the front door to open a summoning bell.

She opens it and staggers back, almost falling to the floor. Will rushes down the stairs and across the hall to help. And looks up at the man at the door. He quite understands Miss Bloom’s response.

“Hannibal? How? Dear god! How?”

Never mind the open front door he practically throws himself at Hannibal and clasps him round the neck. Hannibal embraces him tightly and they stand there, arms round the other, a happy knit, and to hell with the door open to the world. They stand like this, and sway and clutch.

From the top of the stairs Mischa calls.

“Will? Alana?”

She comes slowly down the stairs as Will and Hannibal draw apart. “Oh.” She says. “Oh!”

Hannibal rushes up the stairs to her, and lifts her from her feet. “My darling, my lovely girl.”

He practically carries her down, and then across the hallway into the drawing room where he deposits her in a chair.

Will follows them in and then drags a chair beside the second where he usually sits, and they sit, the three of them, all with their knees close to each other, their hands in a knot together.

“I suppose I must give you an explanation?”

Mischa laughs, perhaps with a slight edge of hysteria.

“You don’t have to. Really. What matters is now.” She dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief.

Hannibal looks at Will’s face.

“I think I might.”

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Late that night Hannibal is asleep and Will curls round his sleeping form hardly daring to close his eyes. Imagining that if he shut them that Hannibal might suddenly disappear.

They’d listened to the explanation, a story of Hannibal lending his coat with his wallet in it, of being taken on board with hypothermia, of Mrs Crawford being rushed to the Captain’s quarters and no one, eventually to know his name. That he’d been looked after below in a second class cabin, the family who’d cared for him taking him ashore and housing him until after he was well. Nothing heroic he’d claimed. Though they’d seen a sharp grief in his face, something about which he did not yet wish to speak.

When he’d finished the story, and they had cried anew, they’d eaten a cold supper and then both Will and Mischa had told their own tales, the three accounts jigsawing into other already publicised narratives shared in the press.

“Only twenty boats?”

“But that was all.”

“The problem was in part that most were barely half full. They could have saved at least another seven hundred more.”

“And the ice? And cold?”

They talk until the fire has died away. Mischa reluctantly takes her leave perhaps aware that there are words between them her ears are not meant to hear. When she is gone Hannibal holds out a hand that Will readily takes, Hannibal strokes it with his thumb.

“Where have you slept since you arrived?”

“In your room. I wanted, well.. you can imagine.”

“My imagination is excellent. But I prefer the reality. And will you sleep there again tonight?”

“With you? I’d rather not sleep, but yes. If you’ll have me.”

He flushes at his words but Hannibal stands and pulls him out of the room by their joined hands. Then up the stairs and into what has become Will’s room.

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In the room they are both quiet as they help each other to undress. It is a softly speaking joy and new discoveries that sees their passion into bed. When Hannibal kisses him Will clings and Hannibal whispers into his neck.

“I did not think to see you again. I’d thought you must have drowned or froze.”

“We thought you were gone. It has been a sort of hell. Mischa and I.. Mischa.. she asked me to stay. She thought you’d want it. So did she. For the company and maybe the shared and understood sorrow. We have both felt stuck. Nowhere to go forwards to, but not able to remain. It is been a hard thing. But we have had each other.”

He rubs his hand across his face, perhaps trailing through some tears, and sighs.

“I’ve missed you. So, so much. And probably imagined you as more enamoured of me than you maybe were.”

Hannibal kisses him again.

“And I had been afraid you’d think it just a ship board thing and if you’d lived that I would never find you here.”

He kisses him once more.

“And you will stay?”

“If you want me to, I’ll never leave.”

“I want you to. To never leave.”

“I thought that. On the boat. That I couldn’t leave without you. That somehow I had to wait. That you would know.”

Hannibal draws him closer.

“I knew. I think I knew.”

He kisses him again. And more.

When Will has arched his back and gasped and Hannibal has groaned and begged and they have both met each other fully, slowly Hannibal lets himself slip down into sleep. But Will stays awake. Keeping a lighthouse eye.

What was lost upon the chaos has now been found. The reports may speak of the dark and rude, the ice and fear, but they are here and whole and not all things must be lost to the great and terrible maw of the sea. Sometimes those that fall might be redeemed, and those that sink may yet be found to swim.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading... lots of lovely early 20th century AUs in the fandom! I commend them to you.. if you like rare pairs look for Ellis Ashmead Bartlett and Igor Stravinsky!

If you like what I do I encourage you to read, subscribe, share, reblog, or rec (but not like the Titanic). I have a ko-fi too, the link is on my twitter and tumblr headers and on my profile page. I’m electrarhodes everywhere.. if we've met I’d love to carry on the conversation. If we haven’t, Hello! I’m glad to meet you! Xxx

End Notes

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And a stupid amount of research has gone into this short fic! And I know! How many others am I working on? But when the Plot Bunny bites?

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!